Group removes Paulk from post

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His story

John Paulk told The Gazette that week that he was looking for a bathroom and didn't know he had walked into a gay bar. He said he then figured it out and stayed because he was curious about whether gay bars had changed.

By Eric Gorski
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The Gazette

A Seattle-based Christian group that preaches that gays can "change" has removed John Paulk as board chairman because he visited a Washington, D.C., gay bar last month and lied about it afterward, the organization said Wednesday.

Paulk will continue as a board member of Exodus International North America on a probationary status.

Exodus director Bob Davies said Paulk had damaged the credibility of the "ex-gay" movement and deserved a punishment that balanced compassion with justice.

The status of Paulk's job at the Colorado Springs-based ministry Focus on the Family is not as clear.

Paulk, who has been on vacation since Sept. 22, shortly after news of his gay bar visit became public, is still employed at Focus on the Family, a Focus official said Wednesday. But he declined to say whether Paulk still heads the ministry's homosexual and gender issues division.

Paulk was not granting interviews Wednesday.

Paulk, 37, gained national attention for saying he abandoned homosexuality for Christianity, then became a husband and father. He was pictured in 1998 with his wife, a self-described ex-lesbian, on the cover of Newsweek.

The therapy practiced by groups such as Exodus has been criticized by the medical establishment as damaging. Paulk has offered himself as proof that isn't the case.

On Sept. 19, a gay activist recognized Paulk at a Washington, D.C., gay bar and summoned a colleague who confronted Paulk and photographed him.

Paulk, who was in the capital on business, told The Gazette that week that he was looking for a bathroom and didn't know he had walked into a gay bar. He said he then figured it out and stayed because he was curious about whether gay bars had changed.

Paulk repeated that version of what happened to officials at Exodus International and Focus on the Family.

But Davies said Paulk changed his story last week. Davies said Paulk admitted that he knew he was entering a gay bar. Davies said he thinks Paulk lied out of fear.

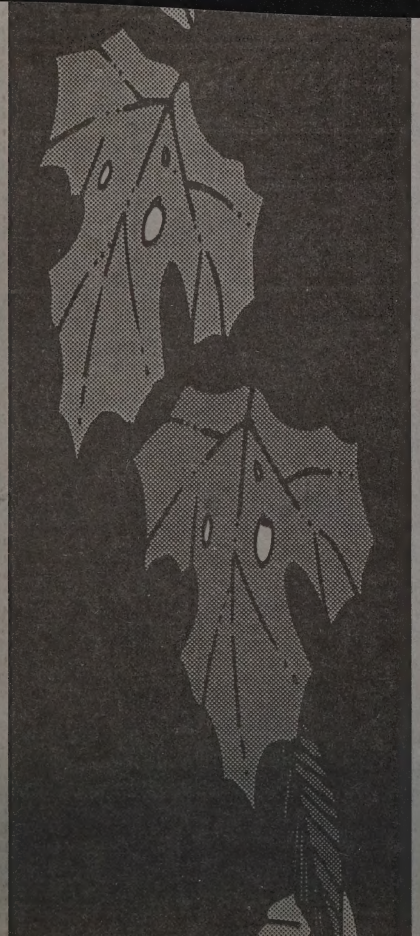
He said Paulk didn't explain why he entered the bar, except to say that he wasn't seeking gay sex. Gay activists have seized Paulk's bar visit as proof that he's still gay.

Davies said in his view, Paulk was "simply getting away for an hour to escape the pressures of life. And that was his pattern in the gay community. Homosexuality has always been an escape for John." He said that Paulk undermined his credibility by not being honest at first.

Tom Minnery, vice president of public policy for Focus on the Family, said the Exodus board's action was appropriate. He then discussed whether Paulk's status with Focus on the Family would be reconsidered in light of Exodus' moves.

"I believe John eventually will be leading the Love Won Out ministry again," Minnery

See Paulk Metro 4



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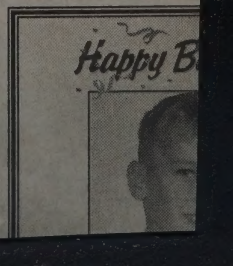

Paulk: Status with Focus still not determined

From Metro 1

said, referring to Focus' ministry aimed at changing gays. "But there's a lot that has to be worked out in the short term, and we'll start doing that when John gets back to work" on Monday.

Asked whether that meant Paulk wasn't leading the ministry now, Minnery said he couldn't answer because it's against Focus policy to discuss disciplinary actions against employees.

Minnery said that while Focus was concerned that Paulk lied about going into the bar, he was glad Paulk eventually told the truth. "We are standing behind John," Minnery said.

County Clerk and Recorder's Office's four locations by 7 p.m. Election Day. Those are: Centennial Hall, 200 S. Cascade Ave.; Chapel Hills Mall, 1710 Briargate Blvd., Suite 350; 115 Fontaine Blvd., Widefield; East Library and Information Center, 5550 N. Union Blvd.

In Teller County, request an absentee ballot at the clerk's office in Cripple Creek or at 540 Manor Court, Woodland Park, or by calling 689-2951.

Absentee ballots are due back to the clerk's offices by 7 p.m. Election Day.

Whom to call:

- El Paso County Clerk and Recorder's Office, 575-VOTE (8683)
- El Paso County Republican Party, 578-0022
- El Paso County Democratic Party, 473-8713